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# Jewish Studies and Jewish Folklore

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# Jewish Studies and Jewish Folklore

## **Abstract**

Occasionally in the annals of scholarship there are events that turn upon themselves, so that, instead of being forums for exchange of ideas about a defined topic, they themselves become a subject for analysis and self-rejection. Our present panel is such an occasion. This is the first time in the history of the World Congresses for Jewish Studies that the program committee has allocated the discipline of folklore a plenary session, treating it as the equal of history, literature, Jewish languages and other fields that make up the entire gamut of Jewish studies. And thereby hangs a question. Why the long delay in such recognition, and what has changed now, at the Tenth World Congress, that a new recognition of folklore is warranted? Any attempt to answer this question requires a careful examination of the complex relations between the discipline of folklore and the field of Jewish studies.

## **Disciplines**

Cultural History | Folklore | Jewish Studies | Near and Middle Eastern Studies | Oral History

## JEWISH STUDIES AND JEWISH FOLKLORE

DAN BEN-AMOS

Occasionally in the annals of scholarship there are events that turn upon themselves, so that, instead of being forums for exchange of ideas about a defined topic, they themselves become a subject for analysis and self-reflection. Our present panel is such an occasion. This is the first time in the history of the World Congresses for Jewish Studies that the program committee has allocated the discipline of folklore a plenary session, treating it as the equal of history, literature, Jewish languages and other fields that make up the entire gamut of Jewish studies. And thereby hangs a question. Why the long delay in such recognition, and what has changed now, at the Tenth World Congress, that a new recognition of folklore is warranted? Any attempt to answer this question requires a careful examination of the complex relations between the discipline of folklore and the field of Jewish studies.

During the past two years Eli Yassif has offered us an essay that appears to provide precisely this necessary analytical examination.<sup>1</sup> With ample bibliographical evidence Yassif has demonstrated the contribution of folklore studies to biblical research, to Aggadic and Talmudic scholarship, to Jewish history, including research on anti-semitism, and to Hebrew literature studies. For folklorists this article creates euphoria. Clearly the major concepts of folklore appear to have infiltrated and influenced the core disciplines of Jewish studies. More than any other discipline, folklore has contributed methods and theories to its sister disciplines in Jewish studies, and the only conclusion that folklorists, and for that matter all Judaica scholars, must reach, is that without the contribution of folklore their own disciplines would have been gravely impaired. In fact Yassif himself arrives at a similar conclusion, though he does not formulate it so boldly.<sup>2</sup>

Illusionary as this conclusion is, the survey itself raises many questions. Why do only folklorists recognize the centrality of their contribution to history, literature and Jewish thought, religion and law, while the scholars in those other disciplines do not? Why are there folklorists on the faculty of every university in Israel (Tel Aviv University being the only exception), but not a single folklore *department* in any of them? Why do top American universities and colleges offer courses in Jewish studies, some even with full fledged departments and programs, yet there is rarely a Jewish folklorist among their ranks?<sup>3</sup> Why, when American scholars convene to discuss the place of Jewish studies in

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<sup>1</sup> Eli Yassif, "Folklore Research and Jewish Studies (A)," *World Union of Jewish Studies Newsletter* 27(1987):3-26; idem, "Folklore Research and Jewish Studies (B)," *World Union of Jewish Studies Newsletter* 28(1988):3-26.

<sup>2</sup> Op.cit. (B), pp. 25-26.

<sup>3</sup> See Arnold J. Band, "Jewish Studies in American Liberal Arts Colleges and Universities," pp. 3-30 in *American Jewish Year Book 1966*, Vol. 67, ed. Morris Fine, Milton Himmelfarb and Martha Jelenko (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1967). Although since Arnold Band conducted this survey the position of Jewish studies in American higher education has been strengthened considerably, there has been only a slight change as far as folklore and folklorists are concerned.

the curriculum of the New Humanities do they consider a wide range of subjects, such as religious studies, social sciences, Hebrew literature and language, Jewish philosophy and history, but do not make even a gesture toward folklore?<sup>4</sup> Why, in a survey of names in a directory targeted at a scholars who conduct research in Jewish folklore and ethnography only 3.8% of the respondents relate to Jewish folklore in their professional definition or affiliation?<sup>5</sup> Why do the central journals in Jewish studies such as *AJS Review: The Journal of the Association for Jewish Studies*, *Journal of Jewish Studies* and *Tarbiz* publish articles on folkloristic topics with the frequency of summer rains in Israel?<sup>6</sup> The last significant article about folklore in another journal, *Zion*, appeared sixty years ago in 1930. This was Bernhard Heller's essay "Tasks of Jewish Folklore and Ethnography in General and Particularly in the Holy-Land,"<sup>7</sup> a programmatic and methodological essay that appeared appropriate for a journal that was the forum for the Jewish Historical and Ethnographic Society.

The pattern of neglect has continued until very recently, in different forms on different occasions. When in 1984 the Hebrew University celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of the Institute of Jewish Studies, the symposia and lectures addressed research accomplishments in biblical studies and in Jewish thought, history and literature, but none focused on folklore.<sup>8</sup> When the Jewish Theological Seminary, the prime institute of Jewish studies in the United States, celebrated its centennial in 1987 with a conference on "The State of Jewish Studies," the program did not include a single lecture on folklore. Evidently the conference organizers were eager to reflect the place of folklore in Jewish learning. Painfully correct, such an omission is particularly saddening when it occurs within an institution that counted among its glorious faculty Professor Louis Ginzberg, whose *Legends of the Jews*<sup>9</sup> is a basic research tool not only in folklore but in all fields of Jewish studies, and who, in spite of his profound erudition in everything Jewish, chose to

<sup>4</sup> See Jacob Neusner, ed., *New Humanities and Academic Disciplines: The Case of Jewish Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> See Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, et al., eds., "International Directory of Researchers in Jewish Folklore, Ethnology, and Related Fields," *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Newsletter* 3 (1980):1-36. Of the 341 people who responded to the questionnaire, aside from students, only 13 indicated an institutional affiliation with folklore, yet all of them have a deep interest in Jewish folklore and ethnography.

<sup>6</sup> The following table compares the publication of folklore with general Jewish studies articles in these three journals.

	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
<i>AJS</i>	-	16/1	9/-	8/1	12/-	9/1	10/-	13/-	-	5/-
<i>JJS</i>	12/-	15/-	14/-	7/-	16/-	13/-	14/-	46/-	13/-	15/-
<i>Tarbiz</i>	17/-	29/-	24/-	15/-	34/-	36/1	25/-	57/1	51/-	53/1

The first figure refers to the total number of articles that appeared in a designated journal in a particular year, the second to the folklore articles. As the table demonstrates, the appearance of the new journal *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* (1981) has not affected the publication of folklore articles in the central publications in Jewish studies. (The 1982 volume of *JJS* was in honor of Professor Yigael Yadin and hence devoted to archaeology. In the years 1980-1984 *Tarbiz* included an additional article in each volume that might refer to folklore in an interdisciplinary fashion).

<sup>7</sup> *Zion* 4(1930):72-94.

<sup>8</sup> See Moshe Bar-Asher, ed., *Studies in Judaica: Collected Papers of the Symposium in Honor of the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Institute of Jewish Studies (December 1984)* (Jerusalem: Akademon, 1986). Among the speakers only E. E. Urbach and Gershon Cohen made casual remarks referring to "Jewish ethnic traditions" (p. 13), and to "two volumes on Yiddish folk poetry" (p. 30).

<sup>9</sup> (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1909-1939).

deliver a lecture on "Jewish Folklore: East and West," at the Harvard Tricentennial Conference in 1936.<sup>10</sup>

Even on the level of Jewish popular scholarship, folklore is neglected or completely ignored. The omnibus volume *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*, edited by Arthur Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr contains, under the canopy of essays about religion, articles about such diverse subjects as "Love," "Peace," even "Mentsch," but not a single entry for folklore. This omission has occurred not for the lack of folklorists in this volume, as is evident from the essay on "Myth" contributed by Galit Hasan-Rokem. Could she be right when she writes that "'Myth and Judaism' is deemed by many an impossible combination of words. Both Jewish and Christian scholars, regardless whether their point of departure has been theological or secular, have been loath to attribute the concept of myth to Jewish religious literature"?<sup>11</sup> After all, myth stops functioning as such, in traditional society (or, for that matter, in any other society) the minute it is so defined. The cultural and the analytical perspectives clash head on in their respective attitudes toward myth. While the former requires the absolute belief in a myth's substance (otherwise it is not a myth by definition), the latter insists upon the myth's falsehood, constructibility, and manipulability.<sup>12</sup> Could it be that folklore, a discipline that barely escaped the fortune of being named "mythography," has maintained the inherent properties of myth, and therefore has it retained the fundamental antagonism between the culture it studies and the culture itself, or, in other words, the resistance of the subject to turn into an object? If so then, because the field of Jewish studies is an historical outgrowth of Jewish culture, it cannot absorb folklore into its midst.

It would be a mistake to cast an answer to all these questions in anecdotal terms, involving personalities, financial considerations and the sheer vagaries of academic life. Although, no doubt, these are important and sometime even crucial factors, the obstacles they present are surmountable when a broader theoretical framework for a discipline is available and its intellectual indispensability is recognized. Similarly erroneous would be the tendency, to which all of us are sometime prone, to cast the drama of academic planning in terms of a struggle between good and evil. The universe of the university is not necessarily an arena for a war between "the sons of light and the sons of darkness," in which, from our perspective, the folklorists are the little understood victims, and all the rest make up the evil kingdom of heartless administrators and blindfolded scholars who have not yet discovered the "true nature of folklore." Such an attitude may be reassuring, confirming the rightness of the course of folklore, but it would be misleading and deluding. In fact there is some evidence that it is simply wrong.

<sup>10</sup> Louis Ginzberg, *On Jewish Law and Lore* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1955), pp. 61-73 [originally published in 1936].

<sup>11</sup> Galit Hasan-Rokem, "Myth," p. 657 in *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought: Original Essays on Critical Concepts, Movements, and Beliefs*, ed. Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1987).

<sup>12</sup> This is hardly the place to explore and debate the numerous definitions of myth and the subsequent theories that relate to them. References to some recent publications can serve as a preliminary guide to this problem. Marcel Détienné, *The Creation of Mythology*, trans. Margaret Cook (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); William G. Doty, *Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1986); G. S. Kirk, *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970); M. I. Steblin-Kamenskij, *Myth*, trans. Mary P. Coote and Frederic Amory, with a "Critical Introduction" by E. Leach and an "Epilogue" by Anatoly Liberman (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Karoma, 1982); Ivan Strenski, *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth-Century History: Cassirer, Eliade, Lévi-Strauss and Malinowski* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1987).

At the turn of the century, when Martin Buber contemplated the position of Jewish science at the university from the dual position of a Zionist and a scholar he reached a conclusion ridden with ambivalence. As a Zionist he took a pragmatic approach, wishing to learn about the Jews in order to improve their lot. As a scholar, however, he realized that any Jewish science does not have a base in an independent theory and method. For him Jewish science was "from the beginning: A species of philology. Its object was ancient Jewish literature; its method of research was philological." Beyond philology Jewish science could be only an interdisciplinary complex, the respective components of which would be grounded in their respective disciplinary methods and theories. From such a point of view Buber allocates to folklore its due place in the academy. He states: "[T]he history of the Jewish people is certainly part of the science of history, the legislation in Bible or Talmud part of a general history of law, *studies of Jewish legends and customs part of folklore* [emphasis mine], the research of ancient Jewish monuments part of archeology and the history of art..."<sup>13</sup> Thus the cautious attitude toward the concept of an academic discipline of Jewish sciences indirectly secures for folklore a respectable position in Jewish studies alongside history, law, archaeology and ethnology.

Later, shortly after mid-century, at the dawn of modern folklore research in Israel, Gershom Scholem extended a welcoming hand to folklore. In his seminal essay "The Science of Judaism--Then and Now" he refers specifically to folklore as an example of the renewed spirit of Jewish studies. He writes:

We have renounced the bottled product which in the past so often constituted the science of Judaism. We have committed ourselves to the task of investigating what is alive in Judaism, of undertaking an empirically oriented impartial enterprise instead of an antiquarian history of literature. Achievements of this sort can already be seen in the fields of Talmud and history of religion, medieval Hebrew poetry (which only in our own generation has been revealed in all its beauty and significance), and the previously untouched area of folk literature.<sup>14</sup>

What then happened to Jewish studies, so that it extended a hand only to withdraw it at the moment that really counts, namely when the time came for the institutionalization of the field within the academic framework? Why has the discipline of folklore been granted only a marginal position in relation to Jewish studies in general? Any attempt to smooth over the situation, to glorify research accomplishments yet ignore their reception by scholars in other disciplines of Jewish studies, will but ensure the perpetuation of the peripheral existence of folklore, hovering at the edges of Jewish studies and never occupying the center stage it holds in overall Jewish culture. It is essential that Jewish folklorists probe the precarious position of their discipline in Jewish studies with neither self-pity nor accusations.

<sup>13</sup> Originally published as "Juedische Wissenschaft," *Die Welt*, nos. 41-43(1901); quoted from "Jewish Science: New Perspectives," pp.211-213 in *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, ed. Paul R. Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

<sup>14</sup> Gershom Scholem, "The Science of Judaism--Then and Now," pp. 304-313 (quotation p. 313) in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken, 1971) [originally published in 1960]. See also idem, "The Science of Judaism--Past and Present," pp. 136-142 (discussion p. 141) in *The Heritage of German Jewry: Essays*, ed. A. Tarshish and J. Ginat (Jerusalem: Leo Baeck Institute / Ha-Kibbutz ha-Meuahd, 1975).

The answers to such a reflective search are myriad, but among them it is possible to discern historical, ideological, methodological and social reasons that have contributed to the liminal position that folklore has in Jewish studies.

### *The Historical Dimension*

Historically, the ambivalence toward folklore that characterizes Jewish studies has its roots in the second decade of the nineteenth century in Germany, where a group of young students formed the *Verein für Kultur und Wissenschaft der Juden* and in several programmatic essays formulated the principles, methods and goals of the "Science of Judaism."<sup>15</sup> Certainly, Jewish studies has been transformed several times since that decade, in response to political events, ideological movements and philosophical and scholarly trends. Dinur counts four distinct periods of scholarship,<sup>16</sup> and Schweid is witnessing the growth of a fifth generations of Judaica scholars,<sup>17</sup> each of which formulates its own attitudes, conceptions, theories, methods and research targets. Yet throughout all these generational shifts and conceptual readjustments the status of folklore has remained marginal: "folklore has hardly ever enjoyed a respected and legitimate position in Jewish studies."<sup>18</sup>

Since these relations have persisted over the years, transcending historical changes, academic trends and disciplines, it is necessary to search for their causes at the initial formulation of Jewish studies themselves. Indeed major scholars of Jewish studies have recognized that the *Wissenschaft* group has had a lasting influence on all subsequent Jewish studies. Gershom Scholem, for example, states the impact of the group succinctly: "The Science of Judaism' originated in Germany. After Leopold Zunz, his fellow members [of the Association], and the great founders of the 'Science of Judaism' that followed him, attempted to formulate this science and spread its reputation, it crossed the border of Germany and had a great influence within all the territories in which Jews settled. This heritage that German Jewry left behind with the establishment of

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<sup>15</sup> For a selection of these papers see Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz, eds. op. cit. pp. 182-213. For selective historical studies and evaluations see Nahum N. Glatzer, "The Beginnings of Modern Jewish Studies," pp. 27-45 in *Studies in Nineteen-Century Jewish Intellectual History*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964); Alfred Abraham Greenbaum, "The *Verein für Kultur und Wissenschaft der Juden* in Jewish Historiography: An Analysis and Some Observations," pp. 173-185 in *Texts and Responses: Studies Presented to Nahum N. Glatzer on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday by His Students*, ed. Michael A. Fishbane and Paul R. Flohr (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975); H. G. Reissner, "Rebellious Dilemma: The Case Histories of Eduard Gans and Some of His Partisans," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 2(1957): 179-204; Ismar Schorsch, "From Wolfenbutel to Wissenschaft: The Divergent Paths of Isaak Markus Jost and Leopold Zunz," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 22(1977):109-128; idem, "Breakthrough into the Past: The Verein für Kultur und Wissenschaft der Juden," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 33(1988):3-28; Sinai (Siegfried) Ucko, "Geistesgeschichtliche Grundlagen der Wissenschaft des Judentums," *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland* 5(1934):1-34; reprinted pp. 315-352 in Volume I of *Wissenschaft des Judentums in deutschen Sprachbereich: Ein Querschnitt*, ed. Kurt Wilhelm (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1967); Max Wiener, *Jüdische Religion in Zeitalter der Emanzipation*, Hebrew translation by Leah Zagagi (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1974), pp. 204-285.

<sup>16</sup> "Wissenschaft des Judentums," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 16:570-584.

<sup>17</sup> Eliezer Schweid, "The Criticism of 'Chochmat Israel' at the Turn of the Century and the Problems of Jewish Studies in Our Time," *Gesher* 31(1985/1986):45.

<sup>18</sup> Eli Yassif, "Folklore Research and Jewish Studies," *Newsletter: World Congress of Jewish Studies* 27(1987):3.

the 'Science of Judaism,' exerts its influence until today...<sup>19</sup> Similarly, when Jacob Katz wishes to examine the role of Jewish studies and Judaism in present day Israeli society he takes the programmatic essays and early studies of the *Wissenschaft* group as his starting point.<sup>20</sup>

The lasting impact of the *Wissenschaft* group stems directly from their particular historical position in Jewish learning. They defined the boundaries for the paradigm of the academic study of Judaism by Jews, setting up the goals, ideals and standards for future research directions. In many ways, in spite of criticism and claims of departure and expansion, we all follow in the path they opened, continuing in their tradition in spite of its shortcomings, because their radical departure from previous Jewish learning was truly revolutionary, shifting from a study within the tradition to a scientific study of the tradition, and making the two modes of learning incompatible with each other.<sup>21</sup> Max Wiener states categorically:

All the intellectual and spiritual transformations in Judaism since the beginning of the 19th century go back, directly or indirectly, to the break in Jewish life, the first and most characteristic expression of which was Jewish scientific research (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*). This "science of Judaism" signified far more than what it seemed to be at the outset; it was far more than philological-historical research intended to provide an objective and clear picture of the national past of the Jewish people. It represented an attitude which in itself was a new stage in historical development.<sup>22</sup>

The change they introduced into Jewish learning was not just a matter of language shift from Hebrew to German, as Bialik accused them<sup>23</sup>, nor was it their imitation of foreign models of scholarship, as Ahad ha-'Am charged them.<sup>24</sup> Rather it was their shift in attitude toward Jewish tradition from belief to critique, from experience to analysis, from subject to object. They renounced the authority of tradition and opened it up to inquiry, questioning its validity and subjecting it to analysis.<sup>25</sup> By taking this step they have

<sup>19</sup> Gershom Scholem, "The Science of Judaism--Past and Present," p. 136.

<sup>20</sup> Jacob Katz, "Jewish Studies and Judaism in Our Society," pp. 193-212 in *Jewish Nationalism: Studies and Essays* (Jerusalem: Zionist Library, 1979) [Originally published in 1964/65].

<sup>21</sup> This is a case in which the conception of "scientific revolution" that Thomas S. Kuhn has developed is applicable to a field in the humanities. However, the differences between the two modes of learning arise from incompatibility not between theories but between attitudes toward the object, between belief and non-belief in the sanctity of tradition. For a selection of studies about the concept of revolution in science see Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); idem, *The Essential Tension: Selected Studies in Scientific Tradition and Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977); Barry Barnes, *T. S. Kuhn and Social Science* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); Gary Gutting, ed., *Paradigms and Revolutions: Applications and Appraisals of Thomas Kuhn's Philosophy of Science* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980); Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds., *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

<sup>22</sup> Max Wiener, "The Ideology of the Founders of Jewish Scientific Research," *Yivo Annual of Jewish Social Science* 5(1950):184; see also idem, op. cit. (note 15).

<sup>23</sup> H. N. Bialik, *Collected Writings* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1954), pp. 221-224 [originally published in]

<sup>24</sup> See "The Spiritual Revival," pp. 273-276 in *Selected Essays of Ahad Ha-'Am*, ed. and trans., Leon Simon (New York: Atheneum, 1970) [originally delivered 1902].

<sup>25</sup> See Nathan Rotensreich, *Tradition and Reality: The Impact of History on Modern Jewish Thought* (New York: Random House, 1972), pp. 21-35.



become the historical and intellectual watershed in Jewish learning,<sup>26</sup> undermining the import of tradition in Jewish culture and society, denying its vitality and relevance for the modern Jewish experience. In his passionate, yet analytical and perceptive, criticism of the "Science of Judaism," Gershom Scholem pointed out the destructive forces that operate upon a culture when it is turned into an object of scientific inquiry.<sup>27</sup> Relating to the modern representation of the "Science of Judaism," S. Y. Agnon resonates Scholem's message in his story "Edo and Enam." The fictional temporary residence in the scholar's home that frames the plot in the story has both literal and figurative meaning. Agnon, the author and the narrative persona, is indeed within the "home," that is to say, frame of mind and construct of ideas, of Scholem when he writes:

...all those scholars are modern men: even if you were to reveal the properties of the charms, they would only laugh at you; and if they bought them, it would be only as specimens of folklore. Ah, folklore, folklore! Everything which is not material for scientific research they treat as folklore. Have they not made our holy Torah into either one or the other? People live out their lives according to the Torah, they lay down their lives for the heritage of their fathers; then along come the scientists, and make the Torah into "research material," and the ways of our fathers into--folklore.<sup>28</sup>

The use of folklore in this context as a reference to an exploitive public profitable display of tradition (known currently as "folklorism"<sup>29</sup>) in association with and contrast to research is paradoxical, as far as the beginning of the "Science of Judaism" is concerned, because while the *Wissenschaft* group rejected the concept of folklore as irrelevant to their goals, they drew upon similar sets of ideas as folklore did.

At the time of the founding of the *Wissenschaft* group in 1819, the term folklore had not yet been coined--this would happen only about a quarter of century later in England<sup>30</sup>--but its German cognate *Volkskunde* was already in use, as it first appeared in the writings of Josef Mader (1754-1815) in 1787. The development of the "Science of Judaism" was contemporaneous with the formative years of the science that later became known as folklore. The two disciplines drew upon similar academic trends and traditions of thought. The brothers Grimm preceded most of the founding members of the *Wissenschaft* group by a decade. Jacob and Wilhelm were born in 1785 and 1786 respectively; Leopold Zunz, Eduard Gans, Heinrich Heine and the others were born in the 1790s. One of Zunz's influential teachers, Friedrich Karl von Savigny (1779-1861), was also one of Jacob

<sup>26</sup> Eliezer Schweid, *A History of Jewish Thought in Modern Times* (Jerusalem: Hakkibutz Hameuchad and Keter, 1977), pp. 202-215, especially p. 204; see also Jacob Katz, op. cit. (note 19), p. 197.

<sup>27</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Explications and Implications: Writings on Jewish Heritage and Renaissance* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1976):385-403 [originally appeared in 1945].

<sup>28</sup> S. Y. Agnon, *Two Tales: Betrothed & Edo and Enam*, trans. Walter Lever (New York: Schocken, 1966), p. 210. See also Dan Ben-Amos, "Nationalism and Nihilism: The Attitudes of Two Hebrew Authors Towards Folklore," *International Folklore Review* 1(1981):5-16.

<sup>29</sup> See Hermann Bausinger, *Folk Culture in a World of Technology*, trans. Elke Dettmer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 129-141; Regina Bendix, "Folklorism: The Challenge of a Concept," *International Folklore Review* 6(1988):5-15.

<sup>30</sup> Ambrose Merton [William Thoms], "Folklore," *The Athenaeum* 982(August 22, 1846), pp. 862-863; reprinted pp. 4-6 in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs, N. J. : Prentice-Hall, 1965).

Grimm's influential teachers and close friends.<sup>31</sup> The influence of Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), who founded the University of Berlin in 1810, on both folklore and the "Science of Judaism" is evident in the emphasis that both disciplines put on language and literature in their relations to a national culture.<sup>32</sup> More specifically, as both Bamberger<sup>33</sup> and Wallach<sup>34</sup> have noted, Zunz modeled his programmatic essay for the study of rabbinic literature, *Etwas über die Rabbinische Literature* (1818),<sup>35</sup> after the ideas of August Boeckh (1785-1867), published posthumously in his *Encyclopaedie und Methodologie der philologische Wissenschaften*. Boeckh in turn was influenced by his teacher and friend Friedrich August Wolf (1759-1824), whose classes Zunz attended as well. Wolf's *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (1795) not only was an influential book in classical studies and biblical scholarship, but is also recognized today as the starting point of modern research into the oral dimension of the performance of epic.<sup>36</sup>

Even more significant than the personal connections of friendships and student-teacher relations in which the "science of Judaism" intersected with folklore are the trends of thought and the philosophical concepts that the two budding disciplines shared. The concepts and thoughts of Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) provided a fertile ground upon which both disciplines developed. The concept of *Das Volk*, as Herder formulated and articulated it,<sup>37</sup> was fundamental to folklore and "the science of Judaism"; the idea that a people expressed the essence of their national spirit in their literature inspired scholarship and provided the basis for both<sup>38</sup>. In fact in the absence of any independent political institutions literature, particularly traditional literature, served as the main source for the reconstruction of the essence of Judaism. As Bamberger pointed out: "The concept of *Volksgeist* worked more smoothly when applied to the literary history of such anonymous creations of a people as law, legends, folk-songs, fairy-tales. Compared

<sup>31</sup> See Fritz Bamberger, "Zunz's Conception of History: A Study of the Philosophical Elements in Early Science of Judaism," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 9 (1941):3. For a biographical study that includes many of von Savigny's letters to Jacob Grimm see Adolf Stoll, *Friedrich Karl v. Savigny: Ein Bild seines Lebens mit einer Sammlung seiner Briefe*. 3 vols (Berlin: Carl Heymanns, 1927-1929). On the relationship between von Savigny and Jacob Grimm see also the biographical studies by Ruth Michaelis-Jena, *The Brothers Grimm* (New York: Praeger, 1970); Murray B. Peppard, *Paths through the Forest: A Biography of the Brothers Grimm* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971); Jack Zipes, *The Brothers Grimm* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

<sup>32</sup> See Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Linguistic Variability & Intellectual Development*, trans. George C. Buck and Frithjof A. Raven (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972) [originally published in 1836]; idem, *On Language: The Diversity of Human Language-Structure and its Influence on the Mental Development of Mankind*, trans. Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) [originally published in 1836].

<sup>33</sup> Bamberger, op. cit., pp. 1, 4.

<sup>34</sup> Luitpold Wallach, *Liberty and Letters: The Thoughts of Leopold Zunz* (London: East and West Library, 1959), pp. 16, 23, 26, 74-81; idem, "The Scientific and Philosophical Background of Zunz's 'Science of Judaism,'" *Historia Judaica* 4 (1942):56, 60-61.

<sup>35</sup> See *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin, 1875), I:1-31; a translated selection is in Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz, eds., op. cit. pp. 196-204.

<sup>36</sup> See John M. Foley, *The Theory of Oral Composition: History and Methodology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> Georgiana R. Simpson, *Herder's Conception of "Das Volk"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Libraries, 1921); Martin Schütze, "The Fundamental Ideas of Herder's Thought," *Modern Philology* 20 (1922):361-382.

<sup>38</sup> See Schütze, op. cit.; L. Wallach, op. cit. pp. 16, 75-79, 86-93; idem, "The Scientific and Philosophical Background of Zunz's 'Science of Judaism,'" pp. 57-58; F. Bamberger, op. cit., pp. 2, 20.

with general literature, Jewish literature was much more uniform in this respect."<sup>39</sup> Why then did the *Wissenschaft* group reject the methods, theories and subjects that later generated the discipline of folklore, and define the boundaries of their own discipline in terms that excluded folklore?

A possible explanation for this puzzling situation can be found in the basic concept, method and goal of the *Wissenschaft* group. To a certain extent the youthful founding fathers of the "Science of Judaism" developed their fundamental ideas in reaction to the teaching of their university professors. Friedrich August Wolf, whom Zunz admired, "was very outspoken about the inferiority of the Hebrews as compared with the Greeks and the Romans and hence failed to include their literature in the study of antiquity."<sup>40</sup> Hegel's teaching resonates with St. Augustine's conception that regards Judaism only as prelude to Christianity.<sup>41</sup> In reaction to such views Immanuel Wolf, Zunz and others in their association set out to present the study of Judaism in its own terms as an integral entity in world history. In order to do so they turned to what they considered the essence of Judaism as it unfolds historically in literature, from biblical poetry and prophecy through rabbinical literature and the synagogue prayers. For them the romantic national core that among other peoples could be found, as romantic ideas suggested, among the folk that lived in touch with nature, would be found in Jewish religious literature. As Zunz stated: Jewish "nationality found its center in the Holy Scripture,"<sup>42</sup> and the literature that historically emanated from it. The group searched for the historically unfolding Judaism, and the actual life of the Jews, subject to foreign influences, was a disturbing factor that they would rather ignore than explore.

From this perspective, it is not surprising that Zunz never pursued the ideas he outlined in his programmatic essay "Grundlinien zu einer Künftigen Statistik der Juden."<sup>43</sup> He employs the term "statistics" in the sense that August Ludwig von Schlözer (1735-1809) developed it in his book *Theorie der Statistik, nebst ideen über das Studium der Politik übernaubt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1804). In this sense "statistics" refers to a synchronic analysis of a people, contrasting with a diachronic, historical description. It is analogous to modern-day anthropology, sociology and other social sciences that describe a culture in the ethnographic present. In Zunz's outline, such a study of Jewish society would have included not only the general social, cultural and economic conditions of Jewish society, but also specifically subjects that are under the purview of folklore, such as customs, amusements and folktales. Yet the study of Jewish society would have been incongruous with the search for and construction of Judaism. Contemporary Jewish society could not have reflected the essence of Judaism. European Jews spoke a language that emerged through contacts with other peoples; their daily customs incorporated diverse local beliefs and practices that they adopted in foreign lands; and their literature, in particular their folk-literature, was comparable to the oral traditions of the peoples among whom they lived.

<sup>39</sup> Bamberger, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>40</sup> Bamberger, op. cit., pp. 5-6.

<sup>41</sup> Bamberger points out that Zunz did not attend Hegel's lectures, see: op. cit., p. 11. However Eduard Gans, a leading figure in the group, was a devoted student of Hegel. See H. G. Reissner, "Rebellious Dilemma: The Case Histories of Eduard Gans and Some of his Partisans," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 2(1957):179-204

<sup>42</sup> Quoted from Bamberger, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>43</sup> First published in *Zeitschrift für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* 1(1823):523-532; reprinted in his *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin, 1875-1876), I: 134-141; and in pp. 361-366 of Volume I of Kurt Wilhelm, ed., op. cit.; English summary in Bamberger, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

The search for Judaism rather than Jews still motivates Jewish studies at the present time. Similarly, the exclusion of social sciences from Jewish studies continues, particularly in Israel. This is evident in the program of this very congress, which comprises of four divisions, "The Bible and its World," "The History of the Jewish People," "Jewish Thought and Literature" and "Languages and Arts," without a division of the social sciences; it is also evident in the structure of Judaica studies in Israel. In spite of the fact that most Israeli anthropologists and sociologists study one Jewish society or another, their research and teaching is not part of a program in Jewish studies. The very Hebrew name of our association reflects the concerns with Judaism, *Yahadut*, a normative and ideal concept, rather than *Yehudim*, Jews. This orientation is so strong and pervasive that it supersedes a deliberate decision taken by the governing body of the Hebrew University. The decision in 1924 to establish the Institute for Jewish Studies called for forming a "department of sciences of Judaism which will serve as a center for research of Judaism—the Jewish religion, the Hebrew language and other Semitic languages, literature, history, law, philosophy and all ways [literally, "branches"] of life of the Jewish people in general and the study of Eretz-Israel in particular."<sup>44</sup> However, at the present time as in the very early stages of this discipline, the study of the "ways of life" of the Jewish people, folklore included, has not been fully incorporated into Jewish studies.

Zunz's failure to pursue his programmatic essay, "Outline of the Future Statistics of the Jews," can be explained not only on conceptual but also on methodological grounds. He and his peers pursued a historical method to unfold the true nature of Judaism. Nahum Glatzer pointed out that "the predominant philosophy in this new trend in Judaic studies is best described as historicism."<sup>45</sup> Immanuel Wolf states that method explicitly. "The aim," he writes, "will be to depict Judaism, first from a historical standpoint, as it has gradually developed and taken shape; and then philosophically, according to its inner essence and idea."<sup>46</sup> Zunz, who, following his mentors in the classics, focused on literature as the key to the understanding of Judaism, similarly took an historical perspective. He proposed that

Only by considering the literature of a nation as a gateway to a comprehensive knowledge of the course of its culture throughout the ages, by noting how at every moment the essence of the given and the supplementary, i.e., the inner and the external array themselves; how fate, climate, customs seize one another in friendly or hostile spirit, how finally, the present is the necessary result of all that preceded it—<sup>47</sup>

Only then will it be possible to obtain a complete view of Judaism. Earlier in his essay Zunz spells out in practical terms how such a program can be carried out through critical editions of manuscripts, good translations, accurate reference works, biographies and the like. In subsequent generations the "Science of Judaism" implemented this program almost to the letter. Even such a scholar as Gershom Scholem, who criticized the "science of Judaism" on several occasions,<sup>48</sup> followed the historical method that Zunz has

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<sup>44</sup> Quoted from Moshe Bar-Asher, ed., op. cit., p.3.

<sup>45</sup> Glatzer, op. cit., p.34. See also idem, "Zunz's Concept of Jewish History," *Zion* 26(1961):208-214.

<sup>46</sup> Wolf, op. cit., p.194.

<sup>47</sup> Zunz, "On Rabbinical Literature," p. 198

<sup>48</sup> Scholem, "Reflections on the 'Science of Judaism'," pp. 385-403 in *Explications and Implications* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1976); idem, "The Science of Judaism—Then and Now," and the "Science of Judaism—Past and Present."

outlined.<sup>49</sup> While in substance Scholem explored non-canonical, or even counter-canonical Judaism,<sup>50</sup> methodologically he followed the same principles Zunz proposed for the study of rabbinical literature. Scholem's letter to Bialik, which can be considered his own programmatic statement for the study of Jewish mysticism, spells out in detail his historical method.<sup>51</sup>

In contrast to the "science of Judaism," the scientific basis for folklore research has been comparative analysis. The strength and the innovation of folklore research was in the ability of scholars to demonstrate the universality of folklore forms and themes. Herder's *Volkslieder* (1778) was comparative and relativistic; the brothers Grimm annotations for the tales they collected demonstrated the diffusion of their themes among many nations in many languages. Methodologically folklore research underscores the universality of the human imagination rather than the particularity of a single national tradition. For a group that wanted present Judaism "in and for itself, for its own sake,"<sup>52</sup> an approach that would demonstrate the relative nature and the comparability of its subject had no value.

But above all, folklore, or the ideas and methods that would later generate the discipline, conflicted with the central goal of the *Wissenschaft* group. The social purpose of their scholarly endeavor was to turn Judaism into a tool that would enable the total integration of Jews, as Jews, into German society. By bestowing upon Judaism academic legitimacy they hoped to obtain for it a respectable position in European intellectual history, and consequently civil recognition as well. The transformation of Judaism into a research object denied it any dynamic role in modern society. The entry of Jews into German civil society accorded to the science of Judaism the role of the eulogist. Zunz wrote bluntly: "Precisely because Jews in our times--limiting our attention to the Jews of Germany--are seizing upon German language and German learning [*bildung*] with such earnestness and are thus, perhaps unwittingly, carrying the neo-Hebraic literature [i.e., rabbinic literature] to its grave, science steps in demanding an account of what has already been sealed away."<sup>53</sup> Unlike their German counterparts, and unlike Herder, on whose ideas they thrived, their aspirations were not national but civil. They did not wish to enkindle the spirit of Judaism, but to dim it for proper scrutiny. A focus on the Jewish folk in Eastern Europe and in Germany would have hindered them in their pursuit of civil liberty and academic positions. Jewish nationality existed in the past and at present was preserved only within the religious domain. Thus theirs was romanticism without nationalism, or to be exact, with an objectified nationalism which is a subject for research rather than a movement in society.

### *The Ideological Dimension*

<sup>49</sup> Compare similar implicit and explicit evaluations by Gerson D. Cohen, "German Jewry as Mirror of Modernity," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 20(1975):xxv; Eliezer Schweid, *Judaism and Mysticism according to Gershom Scholem: A Critical Analysis and Programmatic Discussion*, trans. David Avraham Weiner (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), p. 153.

<sup>50</sup> See David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 189-205. For a survey of his scholarship see Joseph Dan, *Gershom Scholem and the Mystical Dimension of Jewish History* (New York: New York University Press, 1987).

<sup>51</sup> Reprinted in *Explications and Implications*, pp. 59-63.

<sup>52</sup> Wolf, op. cit., p. 194.

<sup>53</sup> Zunz, "On Rabbinic Literature," p. 197; see also Bamberger, op. cit., p. 9; Rotenstreich, op. cit., pp. 23-24; Wallach, "The Beginning of the Science of Judaism in the Nineteenth Century," pp. 53-54.

Folklore did not fare any better in Jewish society in which modern ideologies became the dynamic motivating forces. In other cultures nationalism provided the ideological sanction for the formation of the discipline of folklore.<sup>54</sup> But in Jewish society the search for national identity followed not one but two contrasting attitudes toward folklore. The populist movements that emerged in the Pale of Settlement during the latter decades of the nineteenth century regarded Yiddish language, culture and folklore as the expression and spiritual manifestation of the Jewish national spirit. Already in 1862 "Simon Dankovitch, one of the first modern Jewish nationalists in Warsaw, published an item in *Yutshenka* [a Polish-Jewish journal]... about the need to collect Jewish proverbs and other folklore, since they reflect national philosophy of Jewry."<sup>55</sup> In later years, forged in debates between populists and Zionists, enlightened and traditional Jews, russified revolutionaries and Jewish socialists, Yiddish culture, language and folklore emerged as the emotional core in the national definition of European Jewry. The concern for Yiddish language and folklore was ideologically motivated. Populist ideology and activism generated a genuine interest in Yiddish language and folklore and a recognition of their value as a cultural and literary force.<sup>56</sup> Among the writers, I. L. Peretz (1852-1915) and later Sh. An-ski (1863-1920) were particularly involved in the recording of folklore, encouraging others to follow suit. While the recognition of Yiddish as a "legitimate" language, first by Shiyeh-Mordkhe Lifshitz (1829-1878)<sup>57</sup> and later by many rigorous scholars, generated illustrious scholarship,<sup>58</sup> its study has remained by and large outside the academic structure in general, and, until recently, outside Jewish studies in particular. The early scholarly endeavors in Yiddish language and folklore that were motivated by the populist ideology were first consolidated at the Czernowitz conference in 1908<sup>59</sup> and culminated in the foundation of the *Yiddisher Visenshaftliker Institut* (YIVO) in 1925. Since then YIVO

<sup>54</sup> See Brynjulf Alver, "Folklore and National Identity," pp. 12-20 in *Nordic Folklore: Recent Studies*, ed. Reimund Kvideland and Henning K. Sehmsdorf (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); Loring M. Danforth, "The Ideological Context of the Search for Continuities in Greek Culture," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 2(1984):53-85; Richard M. Dorson, *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), pp. 15-20; Michael Herzfeld, *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology, and the Making of Modern Greece* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982); idem, *Anthropology through the Looking-Glass: Critical Ethnography in the Margins of Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); idem, "Law and 'Custom': Ethnography of and in Greek National Identity," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 3(1985):167-185; Brian Joseph, "European Hellenism and Greek Nationalism: Some Effects of Ethnocentrism on Greek Linguistic Scholarship," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 3(1985):87-96; Louis L. Snyder, "Nationalistic Aspects of the Grimm Brothers' Fairy Tales," *Journal of Social Psychology* 23(1959):219-221; William A. Wilson, *Folklore and Nationalism in Modern Finland* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).

<sup>55</sup> Emanuel S. Goldsmith, *Architects of Yiddishism at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century: A Study in Jewish Cultural History* (Rutherford N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976), p. 49.

<sup>56</sup> See Goldsmith, op. cit.; Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Nora Levin, *While Messiah Tarried: Jewish Socialist Movements, 1871-1917* (New York: Schocken, 1977); Sol Liptzin, *A History of Yiddish Literature* (Middle Village, N. Y.: Jonathan David, 1972), pp. 112-135.

<sup>57</sup> See a quotation of his writing from 1863 in Khone Shmeruk, *Yiddish Literature: Aspects of Its History* (Tel Aviv: Mifalim Universitaim, 1978), p. 277.

<sup>58</sup> B. Borkhov, "[The Library of the Yiddish Philologist]," *Der Pinkes*, ed. Sh. Niger (Vilna, 1913), pp. 1-65. For further discussion and bibliographical references see Joshua A. Fishman, "The Sociology of Yiddish: A Foreword," pp. 1-97 in *Never Say Die: A Thousand Years of Yiddish in Jewish Life and Letters*, ed. Joshua A. Fishman (The Hague: Mouton, 1981).

<sup>59</sup> Goldsmith, op. cit., pp. 183-221.

has provided the facilities and framework for significant studies on Yiddish language, culture and folklore, yet acceptance of this scholarship by academic institutions began only after the destruction of European Jewry and their culture in World War II. Even today, when the language is taught at many universities, its folksy image appears to many incongruous with academic studies.<sup>60</sup> In this case the language stands for the culture and folklore of the people as well. The fallacy of the complete identification of the object of research with its subjects, which has dominated the attitude toward Jewish folklore, has produced a gap between folklore and Jewish studies that until now many of us still labor to bridge.

Folklore studies fared even worse under the other ideology of nationalism: Zionism. The same East-European Jewish culture that populism upheld, Zionism rejected. A return to Zion implied the renunciation of exile and its traditions and a revival of a real or imagined biblical culture, a leap over time into the language, songs and customs of the Bible or their alleged cultural survival among the Arab and Jewish societies of the Near East. The Cananaite movement that sprouted in Israel in the 1950s brought this very Zionist ideology to its extreme but logical conclusion.<sup>61</sup> The return to the land involved a utopian regression in time to the social and cultural life of the biblical Israelites. Some of the major thinkers who formulated the ideological principles of Zionism and participated in the debates that shaped the movement articulated the imperative of abandoning the culture of exile as a prerequisite for a full national revival.

For example, Leon Pinsker (1821-1891) considered the cultural diversity of the Jewish people as an impediment for the development of national identity. "The Jews," he wrote, "lack the characteristic national life which is inconceivable without a common language, common customs [emphasis mine], and common land."<sup>62</sup> The solution to this anomaly is implicit in the presentation of the problem. A return to the land of Israel should entail also the implementation of a common language and the revival of the appropriate customs.

Ahad Ha-Am (1856-1927) articulated the tenets of this ideology in the concept "negation of exile." In the essay so titled he engaged in polemics with the populist movement that sought national autonomy for the Jews in Europe.<sup>63</sup> Ambivalence, unresolved conflicts and sheer power of reason do not allow Ahad Ha-Am to deny the Jewish spiritual creativity in the diaspora, but throughout his polemics the aversion to Yiddish as a language and, by implication, as a culture runs as a dominant theme. His conception of Judaism as a rational system prevented him from accepting the Jewish folk culture into his systematic Zionistic thought.<sup>64</sup> But even a thinker like Micha Joseph Berdyczewski (1865-1921), who wrote in Yiddish and culled Jewish folk tradition from

<sup>60</sup> See Leonard Prager, "Yiddish in the University," pp.529-545 in. Fishman, ed., op. cit.

<sup>61</sup> See Yaacov Shavit, *The New Hebrew Nation: Its Rise and Decline* (Totowa, N. J. : F. F. Case, 1987).

<sup>62</sup> Leo Pinsker, "Auto-Emancipation," p. 76 in *Road to Freedom* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975) [originally published in 1882; translation published originally 1944]. See Ahad Ha-Am's comments on these points in his essay "Pinsker and Political Zionism," pp. 90-124, especially pp. 96-97, in *Nationalism and the Jewish Ethics: Basic Writings of Ahad Ha'am*, ed. Hans Kohn (New York: Schocken, 1962) [originally published in 1902].

<sup>63</sup> Ahad Ha-Am, *At the Crossroads* (Berlin: Judischer Verlag, 1921): IV, pp.106-116.

<sup>64</sup> Op. cit., pp. 116-123.

medieval books,<sup>65</sup> regarded the essence of Zionism as its ability to "negate the entire historic chapter that begins with the Jewish dispersion among the nations."<sup>66</sup> An ideology of denial and negation of reality is not conducive to a scientific exploration of those social and historical aspects it seeks to avert.

The Zionist construction of history, and the cultural system it fostered in the rebuilt Eretz-Israel,<sup>67</sup> fabricated, like Hazaz's hero,<sup>68</sup> a Jewish history without the exile experience, and a Jewish society in which ethnic boundaries melt down. While in other cultures folklore served national ideology by offering a model of "authentic" national culture, in Zionist society folklore could only be a painful reminder of a cultural experience that ran against the grain of the ideology of national revival, and therefore would better be forgotten than preserved and explored. The discipline that could bridge the gap over time and reconfirm the Jewish ties to the land has been archaeology, and therefore it, rather than folklore, has served both scholarly and popular cultural needs for models and traditions. It provided the scientific support for reclaiming land.<sup>69</sup> In contrast Jewish ethnicity has been the mark of exile that ideology would rather erase.

In spite of the deliberate attempt to define research goals in a way that transcends ideological constraints, the historical reality has been such that ethnicity, and along with it folklore, have remained a subject better left to research institutes than to academic disciplines. Such research is tolerate and, with time, even encouraged and financed as new ideological and political pressures develop in the society, but so far folklore has not been established as a discipline recognized for its intellectual tradition and set of theoretical assumptions and methodological principles.

### *The Methodological Dimension*

As a discipline, folklore has been its own worst enemy as far as the prospects of incorporation into Jewish studies is concerned. Methodologically folklore could not have offered a research program that is based on a commitment to and appreciation of Jewish culture, as the founding fathers of the "Science of Judaism" proposed<sup>70</sup> and subsequent generations carried out. Rather its basic tenets required a balanced comparative view that would position Judaism as one culture among many. Even worse, when some scholars applied to Judaism nineteenth-century evolutionary theories of culture that conceived of

<sup>65</sup> M. J. bin Gorion, *Der Born Judas: Legenden, Marchen und Erzählungen*. 6 vols. Trans. Rahel bin Gorion [Ramberg] (Leipzig: Insel, 1916-1923). English edition: *Mimekor Yisrael: Classical Jewish Folktales*. 3 vols., Ed. Emanuel bin Gorion, trans. I. M. Lask (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).

<sup>66</sup> idem, *Essays* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1960), p. 382.

<sup>67</sup> I. Even-Zohar, "The Emergence and Crystallisation of Local and Native Hebrew Culture in Eretz-Israel, 1882-1948," *Cathedra* 16(1980):165-189, especially pp. 170-177.

<sup>68</sup> Haim Hazaz, "Ha-Drashah," pp. 219-237 in *Collected Works: Seething Stones* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1968).

<sup>69</sup> Magen Broshi, "Religion, Ideology, and Politics and Their Impact on Palestinian Archaeology," *Israel Museum Journal* 6(1987):17-32; see especially pp. 26-32; Charles S. Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 110-112; Yaacov Shavit, "Truth Shall Spring out of the Earth: the Development of Jewish Popular Interest in Archaeology in Eretz-Israel," *Cathedra* 44 (1987):27-54, especially pp. 52-54.

<sup>70</sup> See Leopold Zunz, "On Rabbinic Literature," p. 196 in Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz, eds, op. cit.



folklore as a survival of primitive stages of humanity, they implicitly reduced Jewish religion, thought and customs to one of the lower ranks of the evolutionary scale. James G. Frazer (1854-1941), for example, was a true philo-Semite and a personal friend of Solomon Schechter (1847-1915).<sup>71</sup> But his monumental *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament*<sup>72</sup> places biblical religious myths, customs and beliefs alongside those found among the African, Oceanic and North and South American Indian peoples. Such a comparison is hardly appealing to the Euro-centric students of Judaism.

Such an inadvertent negative perception of Judaism notwithstanding, methodologically folklore studies have barely offered Jewish scholarship a new interpretative perspective of Jewish culture. The comparative method that dominated folklore studies throughout the first half of the twentieth century has influenced research trends, directly or indirectly, up to the present era.<sup>73</sup> The basic concepts in folktale studies, for example, have been *motif* and *type*, serving the primary purpose of inventory taking of a particular tradition, and storage and retrieval of information.<sup>74</sup> Fundamental and necessary as they are, as concepts they lack interpretive power. The designation of, say, the *Golem* story as motif D1635 "Golem," pales in comparison to such in-depth studies of the theme as those found in the essays of Gershom Scholem and Moshe Idel.<sup>75</sup>

Yet, the primary tasks of Jewish folklore research have been directly related to the comparative method. In the fifties, when Dov Noy laid the groundwork for a systematic study of Jewish folklore in the modern period in Israel, he made a prudent judgement when he decided to take inventory of the narrative traditions of the diverse incoming ethnic groups and organize them according to the comparative folklore classification principles.<sup>76</sup> Not only was it, at the time, the most advanced method available, but even in more recent days, when other theories and methods are edging their ways into folklore

<sup>71</sup> See Robert Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer: His Life and Work* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 180-196, 330, note 6.

<sup>72</sup> (London: McMillan, 1918).

<sup>73</sup> See Richard M. Dorson, "Current Folklore Theories," *Current Anthropology* 4(1963):93-96; Lauri Honko, "Methods in Folk-Narrative Research: Their Status and Future," *Ethnologia Europaea* 11(1979/80):7-10; Kaarle Krohn, *Folklore Methodology: Formulated by Julius Krohn and Expanded by Nordic Researchers*, trans. Roger L. Welsch, Publications of the American Folklore Society Bibliographical and Special Series, vol. 21 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971); Oscar Lewis, "Comparisons in Cultural Anthropology," pp. 259-292 in *Yearbook of Anthropology-1955*, ed. William L. Thomas Jr. (New York: Wenner Green Foundation of Anthropological Research, 1955); E. J. Lindgren, "The Collection and Analysis of Folk-Lore," pp. 328-378 in *The Study of Society: Methods and Problems*, ed. Frederic Bartlett et al. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1939); Stith Thompson, *Four Symposia on Folklore* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1953), pp. 248-323; idem, "Comparative Problems in Oral Literature," pp. 1-10 in *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 7 (1958).

<sup>74</sup> See Dan Ben-Amos, "The Concept of Motif in Folklore," pp. 17-36 in *Folklore Studies in the Twentieth Century: Proceedings of the Centenary Conference of the Folklore Society*, ed. Venetia J. Newall (Totowa, N. J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1980); Joseph Courtes, *Le conte populaire: poétique et mythologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986).

<sup>75</sup> G. Scholem, "The Idea of the Golem," pp. 158-204 in *Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York: Schocken, 1969); M. Idel, *Golem: The Artificial Man in Jewish Mysticism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990).

<sup>76</sup> For descriptions of modern folktale recording in Israel see Dov Noy, "The First Thousand Folktales in the Israel Folktale Archives," *Fabula* 4(1961):99-110; idem, "Archiving and Presenting Folk Literature in an Ethnological Museum," *Journal of American Folklore* 75(1962):23-28; idem, "Collecting Folktales from Storytellers in Israel," *Bi-Tfutzot Ha-Gola* 8(1967):142-154. For a type index of the first 5000 tales see Heda Jason, "Types of Jewish-Oriental Oral Tales," *Fabula* 7(1965):115-224.

journals, library shelves and university courses, it has remained a fundamental and necessary method. Yet this elementary need of folklore is rendered almost valueless in interdisciplinary connections. Motif and type are ahistorical concepts and therefore historians find little use for them. The cataloguing of folktales has little bearing on their literary value, aesthetic principles and verbal artistry, and consequently students of literature would find the results trivial. The identification of motifs in Jewish traditional literature such as the Talmud and the Midrash has been of immense value for folklore studies,<sup>77</sup> yet the pre-occupation of students in these fields with textual history and manuscript criticism, has directed their attention to the scriptural aspect of tradition and made the comparative dimension of motif-analysis almost irrelevant. In spite of the potential significance of folklore for their interpretation of tradition they resort to folklore research tools and concepts only on rare occasions. In short the very methodological needs of folklore and the discipline's attempts to gain academic credibility have been counter-productive, isolating it from the rest of Jewish studies rather than contributing to the interpretive analysis of Jewish culture.

### *The Social Dimension*

Jewish folklore research in Israel in particular has been the study of the perennial "other." It is a scholarship of exoticism, appropriating distinct ethnic groups as the research object and others as the researching subject.<sup>78</sup> The division reflects the hierarchy of the ethnic groups in the social stratification in Israel, in which Jewish immigrants from Europe generally have a higher position than those from other countries. The attitude that motivates folklore research among Asian and African Jewish communities combines idealization and objectification. From the European point of view, Jews from these countries represent on the one hand, an image that approximates the ideal figure of biblical characters; on the other hand, they become at the same time an object of research with no perceived ethnic identity between the students and the community being studied. This dual attitude manifests itself in the language of scholarship. The social unit of African and Asian Jewry is either *edah*, clan, or *shevet*, tribe,<sup>79</sup> reflecting a terminology that is evocative of both the biblical and the primitive world. Indeed these groups serve folklore scholarship in the dual capacity of the "primitive": the ideal Noble Savage and the debased uncivilized.<sup>80</sup> The terms *edah* and *shevet* are rarely, if ever, applied to East or Central European Jewry.

<sup>77</sup> Dov Noy, "Motif-Index of Talmudic-Midrashic Literature," Unpublished Dissertation (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1954).

<sup>78</sup> See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

<sup>79</sup> The documentation of this usage requires a survey that goes beyond the scope of the present essay. For our purpose it is possible to cite only some isolated examples. The Hebrew title of Itzhak Ben-Zvi's book on North African and Asian Jews is *Nidahei Israel* suggesting a Euro-centric perspective, and he dedicated the book to his wife who jointly with him worked for "the fusion of the Tribes of Israel." The English edition is titled *The Exiled and the Redeemed*, trans. Isaac A. Abbady (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1957). More recently and specifically in folklore scholarship Aliza Shenhar has titled her book in which she analyzes Asian and North African Jewish tales *The Folktales of the Edot of Israel* (Tel Aviv: Tcherikover, 1982). There are some examples of usages that do not conform to this observed pattern. In his book on the Jewish Communities in the World *The Edot of Israel* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1979), Avraham Stahl includes the literature and folk-literature of Jewish Communities from Hungary and Romania.

<sup>80</sup> See Even-Zohar, op. cit., pp. 172-177. On the concepts of "primitivism" and "primitive," see

The selection of Max Grunwald as the "founding father" of modern research in Jewish folklore corresponds to these ethnic relations that underlie modern research in Jewish folklore.<sup>81</sup> Without diminishing the value of his own accomplishments it is necessary to note that he is the first German Jew that began to explore the folklore of the Sephardic Jewish community. The Sephardic Jews were for him, as the Yemenite, Moroccan, and Kurdistan Jews are for many folklorists today, the "other" within, the exotic people that are in the midst of Israeli modern society.

Such an attitude blurs the boundaries between community and academy. It erodes the academic credibility that the discipline of folklore sought to have by placing its scholarly activity not on a purely intellectual foundation but bluntly on a social basis. Among Israeli folklorists it is possible to find scholars of European descent who study the folklore of non-European groups; or folklorists of non-European descent who explore their own traditions (modern equivalents of the *Wissenschaft* group who laid the foundation for Jewish studies), but to the best of my knowledge there is not a single scholar of a non-European descent who studies, say, Yiddish folklore. The reasons for such a division are not solely a matter of scholarly expediency: they are rooted in the social attitudes that prevail in Israeli society.<sup>82</sup>

### *Jewish Folklore and Jewish Studies: Prospects for Convergence*

How then can folklore overcome such well entrenched obstacles, rooted in historical intellectual tradition, in cultural ideology, in method and in the very social structure of the society, and become an integral part of Jewish studies? The task is not easy, yet it is doable; moreover the time is ripe. Not only does folklore seek admittance to the inner circle of Jewish studies, but students of Jewish studies are also becoming aware of the need for programmatic and conceptual modifications in their own discipline, and in such changes the discipline of folklore could potentially play a significant role. In the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies Eliezer Schweid concluded his lecture with a call for interdisciplinary connections among Jewish studies and social sciences, education and

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Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1935); George Boas, *Essays on Primitivism and Related Ideas in the Middle Ages* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1948); Edith Amelie Runge, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Strum und Drang Literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1946); Stanley Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Transaction Books, 1974); Edward Dudley and Maximilian E. Novak, eds., *The Wild Man Within: An Image in Western Thought from Renaissance to Romanticism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972); Hoxie Neale Fairchild, *The Noble Savage: A Study in Romantic Naturalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1928); Ronald L. Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Brian V. Street, *The Savage in Literature: Representations of 'Primitive' Society in English Fiction 1858-1920* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975).

<sup>81</sup> See Dov Noy, "Dr. Max Grunwald--The Founder of Jewish Folkloristics," pp. ix-xiv in Max Grunwald, *Tales, Songs & Folkways of Sephardic Jews*, Folklore Research Center Studies 6 (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1982); idem, "Eighty Years of Jewish Folkloristics--Achievements and Tasks," pp. 1-11 in *Studies in Jewish Folklore*, ed. Dov Noy and Frank Talmage (Cambridge, Mass.: Association for Jewish Studies, 1980). Eli Yassif challenges this view; see his *Jewish Folklore: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1986), p. xii.

<sup>82</sup> After the lecture it was pointed out to me that there is a student of a Yemenite extraction who studies Yiddish and who is interested in specializing in Yiddish folklore. This is definitely a good news and I certainly hope that more will follow. Yet one swallow not only does not make a summer, it clearly indicates that the winter is still on.

law.<sup>83</sup> No doubt Schweid's reasons and goals for changes are different from those presently outlined; moreover he does not mention folklore as a separate discipline specifically. However, for all intents and purpose he could have, because folklore out of necessity and purpose has been in the forefront of interdisciplinary studies, integrating social scientific theories and methods with humanistic principles. Long before Clifford Geertz introduced the concept of "blurred genres,"<sup>84</sup> the discipline of folklore had put the idea into practice. History and culture, literature and religion, psychology and ethnology, sociology and linguistics have converged in shaping the discipline of folklore. For once, the peripheral position of the discipline has proven advantageous. With little vested in its own academic structure, folklore has been free to roam in the intellectual fields to select and combine theories and methods in terms of their analytical adequacy. The synthesis that has been forged, still shifting and open-ended, has made folklore a most desirable partner in any attempt to cross disciplinary boundaries and to overcome intellectual fences that academic structures create.

The desirability of mutual relations between Jewish studies and folklore is not only programmatic and pragmatic; it also has bases, on the one hand, in the theories and methods that are operative in the various disciplines that make up Jewish studies, and on the other hand, in the recent developments in the discipline of folklore. Biblical studies, for example, have long recognized the value of folklore for the interpretation and understanding of the cultures and texts of the ancient Israelites. The folklore concept of oral tradition, the notion of orality, the interface between orality and literacy in traditional societies, the patterning of narratives and biographical cycles and the observation of oral performances in non-literate cultures have all contributed to the illumination of the biblical texts. Such studies, in turn, offer folklore an invaluable historical perspectives that is unavailable otherwise and that provides temporal depth to information obtained in field observations.<sup>85</sup>

History begins to be aware of folklore. While in the past folklore wooed history,<sup>86</sup> at present there are increased indications that historical studies are becoming more cognizant of folklore scholarship as they incorporate into their analysis folklore concepts and address folklore issues and themes. Notable among these research directions are the history of popular culture, the study of oral history and ethnohistory. In the years between the wars in France, Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre founded the *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* (1929) and with it began a school that was identified by the name of the journal, that conceived of history in terms of the common people, the daily life, folklore and

<sup>83</sup> E. Schweid, op. cit., pp. 59-60.

<sup>84</sup> C. Geertz, "Blurred Genres," *The American Scholar* 49 (1980):165-179.

<sup>85</sup> See Dan Ben-Amos, "Folklore (ANE)," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Forthcoming); Patricia G. Kirkpatrick, *The Old Testament and Folklore Study*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 62 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988); Douglas A. Knight, *Rediscovering the Tradition of Israel: The Development of the Tradition-Historical Research of the Old Testament, with Special Consideration of Scandinavian Contributions*, revised edition, Dissertation Series 9 (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1975); Susan Niditch, *Underdogs and Tricksters: A Prelude to Biblical Folklore* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987); J.W. Rogerson, *Anthropology and the Old Testament* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978); Eli Yassif, "Folklore Research and Jewish Studies," *Newsletter: World Union of Jewish Studies* 27(1987); Yair Zakovitch, "From Oral to Written Tale in the Bible," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* 1(1981):9-43.

<sup>86</sup> A classical study is George Laurence Gomme, *Folklore as an Historical Science* (London: Methuen, 1908); for modern studies see Francis A. de Caro, "Folklore as an Historical Science": The Anglo-American Viewpoint." Unpublished Dissertation (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1972); Richard M. Dorson, *American Folklore and the Historian* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

customs of the society. Within this general direction the study of popular culture has become the Cinderella of history, taking a central place in theory and research.<sup>87</sup> The application of the notion of popular culture to Jewish society historically entails its complexities. From without all Jewish culture is by definition popular culture being the folkways of an oppressed ethnic minority; however from within Jewish culture is subject to the same social divisions of "popular" and "elite" as other societies. In Jewish studies there has been research of popular Jewish culture independent of either the French or the American model. From that perspectives the entire scholarship of Gershom Scholem is, on one level, an exploration into the history of Jewish popular culture. He himself has paid little specific attention to folklore,<sup>88</sup> but some of his students like Joseph Dan have done so.<sup>89</sup> In the scholarship of Yiddish literature as well, popular literature has not been neglected.<sup>90</sup> Yet the application of the models for popular culture that have developed in history and folklore could invigorate its study in Jewish society, extending its examination beyond literature into culture and society. Similarly the concept of "oral tradition," that has been a basic staple in folklore scholarship<sup>91</sup> has been incorporated methodologically into the study of history for the past thirty years.<sup>92</sup> Its potential for the study of the history of the Yishuv, the Holocaust and other central events of modern history has been partially explored, yet interdisciplinary cooperation between folklore and history in this area could be a major methodological and theoretical enhancement for both disciplines. Furthermore, the new historiography that would take into account oral sources as they are recorded in

<sup>87</sup> At present the scholarship in this field is so voluminous that only a few references can be mentioned in a note. The following are useful studies that can serve as a starting point for further reading: C. W. E. Bigsby, ed. *Approaches to Popular Culture* (London: Edward Arnold, 1976); Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978); Natalie Z. Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975); Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (New York: Penguin, 1982); Steven L. Kaplan, ed., *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Mouton, 1984). Jean-Claude Schmitt, "Les traditions folkloriques dans la culture médiévale: Quelques réflexions de méthode," *Archives des Sciences Sociales et des Religions* 52/1(1981):5-20.

<sup>88</sup> Gershom Scholem considered his article "Bilar (Bilad, Bilid, BE[L]IAP), the King of the Demons," *Mada'ei Ha-Yahadut* 2 (1926):112-127 to be a model for folklore scholars, and later on wrote: "Folklore scholars chose to ignore that article, and over the years I read some nonsense that they would have not written had they read that essay." See idem, "New Chapters in the Story of Ashmedai and Lilith," *Tarbiz* 19(1948):160.

<sup>89</sup> See for example J. Dan, *The Hasidic Story--Its History and Development* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1975) (Hebrew); idem, *The Hebrew Story in the Middle Ages* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1975) (Hebrew).

<sup>90</sup> See for example David G. Roskies, *Ayzik-Meyer Dik and the Rise of Yiddish Popular Literature*, Unpublished Dissertation (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University, 1974); idem, *The Genres of Yiddish Popular Literature 1790-1860*, Working Papers in Yiddish and East European Jewish Studies 8 (New York: Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, 1975); *Studies in Yiddish Literature and Folklore*, Research Project of the Institute of Jewish Studies, Monograph Series 7 (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1986); Sarah Zfatman, *Yiddish Narrative Prose from Its Beginnings to 'Shivhei Habeshi' (1504-1814)*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1983); idem, *Yiddish Narrative Prose from Its Beginnings to 'Shivhei ha-Beshi' (1504-1814): An Annotated Bibliography*, Research Projects of the Institute of Jewish Studies Monograph Series 6 (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1985); idem, *The Marriage of a Mortal Man and a She-Demon* (Jerusalem: Akademon Press, 1987).

<sup>91</sup> See Alan Gailey, "The Nature of Tradition," *Folklore* 100(1989):143-161.

<sup>92</sup> See David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum, eds., *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* (Nashville, Tenn.: American Association for State and Local History and Oral History Association, 1984).

antiquity, as well as ethnic historical conceptions, would encourage even a broader range for interdisciplinary relations between folklore and history.<sup>93</sup>

But most important of all are the changes that the discipline of folklore itself has undergone in the last quarter of a century. Eclectic, and drawing upon diverse intellectual sources, trends and traditions, folklore has been able to achieve the synthesis that eluded Zunz and his friends, namely to integrate the study of the spirit with the analysis of behavior. Folklore has accomplished that by observing the spiritual and the expressive in society at its behavioral level, and by conceiving of human conduct in social life as a symbolic manifestation of the spiritual. At this level folklore has become both an explorative and an interpretive discipline. It sets out to discover the poetic principles of artistic communication within social units, and seeks to interpret the symbolic systems in specific cultures as the members of these societies use them in their appropriate, and inappropriate, contexts. The artistic texts and their social performances are the subject of interpretation and analysis. The ethnographic description that Zunz could program but could not implement into Jewish studies becomes, in the current folklore synthesis, a humanistic interpretive task in which actions and words are taken at their symbolic value. Folklore is hence posed to explore the symbolic behavior in Jewish societies, not as an ideal normative system, nor as a set of abstract goals, but as a real system that has an historical depth and ethnic diversity, and which is forged anew each time through confrontation with new social and cultural conditions.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>93</sup> See for example David Golan, "Josephus Flavius, Alexander's Visit to Jerusalem and the New Historiography," pp. 29-55 in *Josephus Flavius: Historian of Eretz-Israel in the Hellenistic-Roman Period*, ed. Uriel Rappaport (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben Zvi, 1982).

<sup>94</sup> For review essays that survey and analyze these new trends in folklore see Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs, "Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19(1990), forthcoming; William F. Hank, "Texts and Textuality," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 18(1989):95-127.

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